

Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam

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THE ISLAMIC TRADITION: SOURCES AND INTERPRETATION

Before engaging in any meaningful discussion of a post-patriarchal Islam, I consider it necessary to clarify what I mean by the Islamic tradition, since much confusion surrounds the use of this term. The Islamic tradition—like other major religious traditions—does not consist of, or derive from, a single source. Most Muslims if questioned about its sources are likely to refer to more than one of the following: The Qur'an (the Book of Revelation believed by Muslims to be the Word of God); Sunnah (the practical traditions of the Prophet Muhammad); Hadith (the sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad); Fiqh (Jurisprudence) or Madahib (Schools of Law); and the Shariah (the code of life that regulates all aspects of Muslim life). While all these "sources" have contributed to what is cumulatively referred to as the Islamic tradition, it is important to note that they do not form a coherent or consistent body of teachings or precepts from which a universally agreed upon set of Islamic norms can be derived. Many examples can be cited of inconsistency between various sources of the Islamic tradition, and also of inner inconsistency within some, for example, the Hadith literature. In view of this fact it is inappropriate, particularly in a scholarly work, to speak of the Islamic tradition as if it were unitary or monolithic. Its various components need to be identified and examined separately before one can attempt to make any sort of generalization on behalf of the Islamic tradition in general.

Of the various sources of the Islamic tradition—at least insofar as it is understood theoretically or normatively—the two most important are the Qur'an and the Hadith. Of these two, undoubtedly, the Qur'an is the more

important. In fact, the Qur'an is regarded by virtually all Muslims as the primary source of Islam, having absolute authority since it is believed to be God's unadulterated message conveyed through the agency of Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, who then transmitted it to others without change or error. However, since the early days of Islam, the Hadith literature has been the lens through which the words of the Qur'an have been seen and interpreted.

Before mentioning the importance of the Hadith literature to the Islamic tradition, it is necessary to point out that every aspect of this literature is surrounded by controversy. In particular, the question of the authenticity of individual *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*), as well as of the Hadith literature as a whole, has occupied the attention of many scholars of Islam since the time of Ash-Shafi'i (died in 809). As stated by Fazlur Rahman in his book, *Islam*, "a very large proportion of the Hadiths were judged to be spurious and forged by classical Muslim scholars themselves" (Rahman, 70). This fact has generated much skepticism regarding the Hadith literature in general among "moderate" Muslims. Though few of them are willing to go as far as Ghulam Ahmad Parwez, leader of the *Tulu' e Islam* or the Dawn of Islam movement in Pakistan, who rejects the Hadith literature virtually *in toto*, many of them are likely to be in agreement with the following observations of Moulvi Cheragh Ali, an important Indian Muslim scholar, who wrote in the nineteenth century:

The vast flood of tradition soon formed a chaotic sea. Truth, error, fact, and fable mingled together in an undistinguishable confusion. Every religious, social, and political system was defended when necessary, to please a Khalif or an Ameer to serve his purpose, to support all manner of lies and absurdities or to satisfy the passion, caprice, or arbitrary will of the despots, leaving out of consideration the creation of any standards of test. . . . I am seldom inclined to quote traditions having little or no belief in their genuineness, as generally they are inauthentic, unsupported and one-sided (quoted in Guillaume, 97).

Though valid grounds exist for regarding the Hadith literature with caution, if not skepticism, Fazlur Rahman is right in saying that "if the Hadith literature *as a whole* is cast away, the basis for the historicity of the Qur'an is removed with one stroke" (Rahman, 73). Furthermore, as pointed out by Alfred Guillaume in his book, *The Traditions of Islam*:

The Hadith literature as we now have it provides us with apostolic precept and example covering the whole duty of man: it is *the basis* of that developed system of law, theology, and custom which is Islam (Guillaume, 15).

However skeptical we are with regard to the ultimate historical value of the traditions, it is hard to overrate their importance in the formation of the life of the Islamic races throughout the centuries. If we cannot accept them at their face value, they are of inestimable value as a mirror of the events which preceded the consolidation of Islam into a system (Guillaume, 12-13).

Not only does the Hadith literature have its own autonomous character in point of law and even of doctrine (Hodgson, 232), it also has an emotive aspect whose importance is hard to overstate since it relates to the conscious as well as to the subconscious patterns of thought and feeling of Muslims, individually and collectively, as H. A. R. Gibb has observed perceptively:

It would be difficult to exaggerate the strength and the effects of the Muslim attitude toward Muhammad. Veneration for the Prophet was a natural and inevitable feeling, both in his own day and later, but this is more than veneration. The personal relationships of admiration and love which he inspired in his associates have echoed down the centuries, thanks to the instruments which the community created in order to evoke them afresh in each generation. The earliest of these instruments was the narration of hadith. So much has been written about the legal and theological functions of the hadith that its more personal and religious aspects have been almost overlooked. It is true, to be sure, that the necessity of finding an authoritative source which would supplement the legal and ethical prescriptions contained in the Koran led to a search for examples set by Muhammad in his daily life and practice. One could be certain that if he had said this or that, done this or that, approved this or that action, one had an absolutely reliable guide to the right course to adopt in any similar situation. And it is equally true that this search went far beyond the limits of credibility or simple rectitude, and that it was in due course theologically rationalized by the doctrine of implicit inspiration (Gibb, 194).

PATRIARCHAL ISLAM: IMPACT UPON MUSLIM WOMEN

Having underscored the importance of the Qur'an and the Hadith as primary sources of the Islamic tradition, it is necessary to point out that through the centuries of Muslim history, these sources have been interpreted only by Muslim men, who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women. While it is encouraging to know that women such as Khadijah and A'ishah (wives of the Prophet Muhammad) and Rabi'a al-Basri (the outstanding woman Sufi) figure significantly in early Islam, the fact remains that the Islamic tradition has, by and large, remained rigidly

patriarchal until the present time, prohibiting the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought. In view of this it is hardly surprising that until now the overwhelming majority of Muslim women have remained totally or largely unaware of the extent to which their "Islamic" (in an ideal sense) rights have been violated by their male-centered and male-dominated societies, which have continued to assert, glibly and tirelessly, that Islam has given women more rights than any other religious tradition. Kept for centuries in physical, mental, and emotional confinement and deprived of the opportunity to actualize their human potential, most Muslim women find beyond their capability even the exercise of analyzing their personal life-experiences as Muslim women. Here it is pertinent to mention that while the rate of literacy is low in many Muslim countries, the rate of literacy of Muslim women, especially those who live in rural areas where most of the population lives, is among the lowest in the world.

In recent times, largely due to the pressure of anti-women laws which are being promulgated under the cover of "islamisation" in some parts of the Muslim world, women with some degree of education and awareness are beginning to realize that religion is being used as an instrument of oppression rather than as a means of liberation. To understand the strong impetus to "islamise" Muslim societies, especially with regard to women-related norms and values, it is necessary to know that of all the challenges confronting the Muslim world perhaps the greatest is that of modernity. The caretakers of Muslim traditionalism are aware of the fact that viability in the modern technological age requires the adoption of the scientific or rational outlook, which inevitably brings about major changes in modes of thinking and behavior. Women, both educated and uneducated, who are participating in the national work force and contributing toward national development think and behave differently from women who have no sense of their individual identity or autonomy as active agents in a history-making process and regard themselves merely as instruments designed to minister to and reinforce a patriarchal system, which they believe to be divinely instituted. Not too long ago many women in Pakistan were jolted out of their dogmatic slumber by the enactment of laws, such as those pertaining to women's testimony in cases of their own rape or in financial and other matters, and by "threatened" legislation, such as proposals pertaining to "blood-money" for women's murder, that aimed at reducing their value and status systematically, virtually mathematically, to less than that of men. It was not long before they realized that forces of religious conservatism were determined to cut women down to one-half or less of men, and that this attitude stemmed from a deep-rooted desire to keep women *in their places*, which means secondary, subordinate, and inferior to men.

In the face both of military dictatorship and religious autocracy, valiant efforts have been made by women's groups in Pakistan to protest against the instituting of manifestly anti-women laws and to highlight cases of gross

injustice and brutality toward women. However, it is still not clearly and fully understood, even by many women activists in Pakistan and other Muslim countries, that the negative ideas and attitudes pertaining to women that prevail in Muslim societies in general, are rooted in theology and that unless, or until, the theological foundations of the misogynistic and androcentric tendencies in the Islamic tradition are demolished, Muslim women will continue to be brutalized and discriminated against despite improvement in statistics relating to women's education, employment, social and political rights, and so on. No matter how many sociopolitical rights are granted to women, as long as these women are conditioned to accept the myths used by theologians or religious hierarchs to shackle their bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, they will never become fully developed or whole human beings, free of fear and guilt, able to stand equal to men in the sight of God.

In my judgment the importance of developing what the West calls feminist theology in the context of the Islamic tradition is paramount today with a view of liberating not only Muslim women but also Muslim men from unjust structures and laws that make a peer relationship between men and women impossible. It is good to know that in the last hundred years there have been at least two significant Muslim men scholars and activists—Qasim Amin from Egypt and Mumtaz Ali from India—who have been staunch advocates of women's rights, though knowing this hardly lessens the pain of also knowing that even in this age characterized by knowledge, all but a handful of Muslim women lack any knowledge of Islamic theology. It is profoundly discouraging to contemplate how few Muslim women there are in the world today who possess the competence, even if they have the courage and commitment, to engage in a scholarly study of Islam's primary sources in order to participate in the theological discussions on women-related issues that are taking place in much of the contemporary Muslim world. Such participation is imperative if a post-patriarchal perspective is to emerge in Muslim societies or communities.

PATRIARCHAL ISLAM: THREE FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

How one envisions post-patriarchal Islam depends in large measure upon how one understands patriarchal Islam and its fundamental assumptions and attitudes regarding women and women-related issues. Much of what has happened to Muslim women through the ages becomes comprehensible if one keeps one fact in mind: Muslims, in general, consider it a self-evident fact that women are not equal to men, who are "above" women or have a "degree of advantage" over them. There is hardly anything in a Muslim woman's life that is not affected by this belief; hence it is vitally important, not only for theological reasons but also for pragmatic ones, to subject it to rigorous scholarly scrutiny and attempt to identify its roots.

The roots of the belief that men are superior to women lie—in my judgment—in three theological assumptions: (a) that God's primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from man's rib and therefore derivative and secondary ontologically; (b) that woman, not man, was the primary agent of what is customarily described as *Man's Fall* or expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and hence "all daughters of Eve" are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion, and contempt; and (c) that woman was created not only *from* man but also *for* man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not of fundamental importance. The three theological questions to which the above assumptions may appropriately be regarded as answers are: (1) How was woman created? (2) Was woman responsible for the Fall of man? and (3) Why was woman created? While all three questions have had profound significance in the history of ideas and attitudes pertaining to women in the Islamic as well as the Jewish and Christian traditions, I consider the first one, which relates to the issues of woman's creation, more basic and important, philosophically and theologically, than any other in the context of man-woman equality. This is so because if man and woman have been created equal by Allah, who is the ultimate arbiter of value, then they cannot become unequal, essentially, at a subsequent time. On the other hand, if man and woman have been created unequal by Allah, then they cannot become equal, essentially, at a subsequent time.

It is not possible, within the scope of this essay, to deal exhaustively with any of the above-mentioned questions.¹ However, in the brief discussion of each question that follows, an attempt is made to highlight the way in which sources of normative Islam have been interpreted to show that women are inferior to men.

How Was Woman Created?

The ordinary Muslim believes, as seriously as the ordinary Jew or Christian, that Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was made from Adam's rib. While this myth has obvious rootage in the Yahwist's account of creation in Genesis 2:18-24, it has no basis whatever in the Qur'an, which in the context of human creation speaks always in completely egalitarian terms. In none of the thirty or so passages that describe the creation of humanity (designated by generic terms such as *an-nas*, *al-insan*, and *bashar*) by God in a variety of ways is there any statement that could be interpreted as asserting or suggesting that man was created prior to woman or that woman was created from man. In fact, there are some passages² that could—from a purely grammatical/linguistic point of view—be interpreted as stating that the first creation (*nafs in wahidatin*) was feminine not masculine.³ The Qur'an notwithstanding, Muslims believe that *Hawwa'* (the Hebrew/Arabic counterpart of *Eve*), who incidentally is never mentioned in the Qur'an, was created from the "crooked" rib of Adam, who is believed

to be the first human being created by God. Here it needs to be mentioned that the term *Adam* is not an Arabic term but a Hebrew one meaning of *the soil* (from *adamah*, “the soil”). The Hebrew term *Adam* functions generally as a collective noun referring to *the human* (species) rather than to a male human being.⁴ In the Qur’an also the term *Adam* refers, in twenty-one cases out of twenty-five,⁵ to humanity. Here it is of interest to note that though the term *Adam* mostly does not refer to a particular human being, it does refer to human beings in a particular way. As pointed out by Muhammad Iqbal:

Indeed, in the verses which deal with the origin of man as a living being, the Qur’an uses the words *Bashar* or *Insan*, not *Adam*, which it reserves for man in his capacity of God’s viceregent on earth. The purpose of the Qur’an is further secured by the omission of proper names mentioned in the Biblical narration—Adam and Eve. The term *Adam* is retained and used more as a concept than as a name of a concrete human individual. The word is not without authority in the Qur’an itself (Iqbal, 83).

An analysis of the Qur’anic descriptions of human creation shows how the Qur’an evenhandedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single source. That God’s original creation was undifferentiated humanity and not either man or woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time) is implicit in a number of Qur’anic passages.⁶ If the Qur’an makes no distinction between the creation of man and woman—as it clearly does not—why do Muslims believe that Hawwa’ was created from the rib of Adam? Although the Genesis 2 account of woman’s creation is accepted by virtually all Muslims, it is difficult to believe that it entered the Islamic tradition directly, for very few Muslims ever read the Bible. It is much more likely that it became a part of Muslim heritage through its assimilation in the Hadith literature. That the Genesis 2 idea of woman being created from Adam’s rib did, in fact, become incorporated in the Hadith literature is evident from a number of *ahadith*. Of these, six are particularly important since they appear to have had a formative impact on how Muslims have perceived woman’s being and sexuality (as differentiated from man’s). The *matn* (“content”)⁷ of these six *ahadith*—three from *Sahih Al-Bukhari* and three from *Sahih Muslim* and all ascribed to the Companion known as Abu Hurairah⁸—is given below:

1. Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so if you would try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So treat women nicely (M. M. Khan, 346).

2. The woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her, she will break. So if you want to get benefit from her, do so while she still has some crookedness (M. M. Khan, 80).

3. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should not hurt (trouble) his neighbor. And I advise you to take care of the women, for they are created from a rib and the most crooked part of the rib is its upper part; if you try to straighten it, it will break, and if you leave it, it will remain crooked, so I urge you to take care of woman (M. M. Khan, 81).

4. Woman is like a rib. When you attempt to straighten it, you would break it. And if you leave her alone you would benefit by her, and crookedness will remain in her (Siddiqui, 752).

5. Woman has been created from a rib and will in no way be straightened for you; so . . . benefit by her while crookedness remains in her. And if you attempt to straighten her, you will break her, and breaking her is divorcing her (Siddiqui, 752).

6. He who believes in Allah and the Hereafter, if he witnesses any matter he should talk in good terms about it or keep quiet. Act kindly towards women, for woman is created from a rib, and the most crooked part of the rib is its top. If you attempt to straighten it, you will break it, and if you leave it, the crookedness will remain there so act kindly towards women (Siddiqui, 752-53).

I have examined these *ahadith* elsewhere and have shown them to be flawed both with regard to their formal (*isnad*) as well as their material (*matn*) aspects. The theology of woman implicit in these *ahadith* is based upon generalizations about her ontology, biology, and psychology contrary to the letter and spirit of the Qur'an. These *ahadith* ought, therefore, to have been rejected—since Muslim scholars agree on the principle that any Hadith that is inconsistent with the Qur'an cannot be accepted. However, despite the fact that the *ahadith* in question contradict the teachings of the Qur'an, they have continued to be an important part of the ongoing Islamic tradition. Undoubtedly one of the major reasons for this is that these *ahadith* come from the two most highly venerated Hadith collections by Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (810-70) and Muslim bin al-Hallaj (817-75). These two collections known collectively as *Sahihan* (from *sahih*, meaning "sound" or "authentic") "form an almost unassailable authority, subject indeed to criticism in details, yet deriving an indestructible influence from the *ijma* or general consent of the community in custom and belief, which it is their function to authenticate" (Guillaume, 32). While being included in the *Sahihan* gives the *ahadith* in question much weight among Muslims

who know about the science of Hadith, their continuing popularity among Muslims in general indicates that they articulate something deeply embedded in Muslim culture—namely that women are derivative⁹ creatures who can never be considered equal to men.

Theologically, the history of women's subjection in the Islamic (as well as the Jewish and Christian) tradition began with the story of Hawwa's creation. In my view, unless Muslim women return to the point of origin and challenge the authenticity of the *ahadith* that make all representatives of their sex ontologically inferior and irremediably crooked, male-centered and male-controlled Muslim societies are not at all likely to acknowledge the egalitarianism evident in the Qur'anic statements about human creation.

Was Woman Responsible for the Fall of Man?

Many Muslims, like many Jews and Christians, would answer this question in the affirmative, though nothing in the Qur'anic descriptions would warrant such an answer. Here it may be noted that in Genesis 3:6 the dialogue preceding the eating of the forbidden fruit by the human pair in the Garden of Eden is between the serpent and Eve (though Adam's presence is also indicated, as contended by feminist theologians) and this has provided the basis for the popular casting of Eve into the role of tempter, deceiver, and seducer of Adam; but in the Qur'an, the Shaitan (Satan) has no exclusive dialogue with Adam's "zauj." In two of the three passages that refer to this episode, namely, Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:35-39 and Surah 7: *Al-A'raf*:19-25, the Shaitan is stated to have led both Adam and "zauj" astray though in the former (verse 36) no actual conversation is reported. In the remaining passage, namely, Surah 20: *Ta-Ha*:115-124, it is Adam who is charged with forgetting his covenant with God (verse 115), who is tempted by the Shaitan (verse 120) and who disobeys God and allows himself to be seduced (verse 121). However, if one looks at all three passages as well as the way in which the term *Adam* functions generally in the Qur'an, it becomes clear that the Qur'an regards the act of disobedience by the human pair in *al-jannah* (the Garden) as a collective rather than an individual act for which exclusive, or even primary, responsibility is not assigned to either man or woman. Even in the last passage, in which Adam appears to be held responsible for forgetting the covenant and for allowing himself to be beguiled by the Shaitan, the act of disobedience, that is, the eating from the Tree, is committed jointly by Adam and "zauj" and not by Adam alone or in the first place.

Having said that, it is extremely important to stress the point that the Qur'an provides no basis whatever for asserting, suggesting, or implying that Hawwa', having been tempted and deceived by the Shaitan, in turn tempted and deceived Adam and led to his expulsion from *al-jannah*. This fact notwithstanding, many Muslim commentators have ascribed the pri-

mary responsibility for man's Fall to woman, as may be seen from the following extract:

In al-Tabari's *Tarikh* (1:108) the very words Satan used to tempt Eve are then used by her to tempt Adam: "Look at this tree, how sweet is its smell, how delicious is its fruit, how beautiful is its color!" This passage is concluded by God's specifically accusing Eve of deceiving Adam. Later in the narrative (1:111-112) al-Tabari mentions a report that is also cited by other commentators, the gist of which is to say that Adam while in his full reasoning faculties did not eat of the tree, but only succumbed to the temptation after Eve had given him wine to drink. Al-Tha'labi in citing the same report also stresses the loss of Adam's rationality through the imbibing of wine, and al-Razi (*Tafsir* 3:13) says that such a story, which he has seen in several "tafsirs," is not at all far-fetched. Implicit in this specific act, of course, is both Eve's culpability and Adam's inherent rationality. Lest any should miss the point that Eve is actively and not just innocently involved in Adam's temptation, Ibn Kathir asserts that as God surely knows best, it was Eve who ate of the tree before Adam and urged him to eat. He then quotes a saying attributed to the Prophet, "But for Banu Isra'il meat would not have spoiled (because they used to keep it for the next day), and but for Hawwa' no female would be a traitor to her husband!" (*Bidaya* 1:84) (Smith and Haddad, 139).

There is hardly any doubt that Muslim women have been as victimized as Jewish and Christian women by the way in which the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions have generally interpreted the Fall episode. However, it needs to be pointed out that the Qur'anic account of the episode differs significantly from the biblical account, and that the Fall does not mean in the Islamic tradition what it means in the Jewish, and particularly in the Christian, traditions.

To begin with, whereas in Genesis 3 no explanation is given as to why the serpent tempts either Eve alone or both Adam and Eve, in the Qur'an the reason why the Shaitan (or "Tblis") sets out to beguile the human pair in *al-jannah* is stated clearly in a number of passages (see Surah 15: *Al-Hijr*:26-43; Surah 17: *Bani Isra'il*:61-64; Surah 18: *Al-Kahf*:50; and Surah 38: *Sad*:71-85). The refusal of the Shaitan to obey God's command to bow in submission to Adam follows from his belief that being a creature of fire he is elementally superior to Adam, who is a creature of clay. When condemned for his arrogance by God and ordered to depart in a state of abject disgrace, the Shaitan throws a challenge to the Almighty: He will prove to God that Adam and Adam's progeny are unworthy of the honor and favor bestowed on them by God, being—in general—ungrateful, weak, and easily lured away from the straight path by worldly temptations. Not attempting to hide his intentions to come upon human beings from all sides, the Shaitan

asks for—and is granted—a reprieve until “the Day of the Appointed Time.” Not only is the reprieve granted, but God also tells the Shaitan to use all his wiles and forces to assault human beings and see if they would follow him. A cosmic drama now begins, involving the eternal opposition between the principles of right and wrong or good and evil, which is lived out as human beings, exercising their moral autonomy, choose between “the straight path” and “the crooked path.”

In terms of the Qur’anic narrative what happens to the human pair in *al-jannah* is a sequel to the interchange between God and the Shaitan. In the sequel we learn that Adam and “zauj” have been commanded not to go near the Tree lest they become “zalimin.” Seduced by the Shaitan, they disobey God. However, in Surah 7: *Al-A’raf*:23 they acknowledge before God that they have done “*zulm*” to themselves and earnestly seek God’s forgiveness and mercy. They are told by God to “go forth” or “descend” from *al-jannah*, but in addressing them the Qur’an uses the dual form of address (referring exclusively to Adam and “zauj”) only once (in Surah 18: *Ta-Ha*:123); for the rest the plural form is used, which necessarily refers to more than two persons and is generally understood as referring to humanity as a whole.

In the framework of Qur’anic theology, the order to go forth from *al-jannah* given to Adam or Children of Adam cannot be considered a punishment because Adam was always meant to be God’s viceregent on earth as stated clearly in Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:30. The earth is not a place of banishment but is declared by the Qur’an to be humanity’s dwelling place and a source of profit to it (Iqbal, 84).

There is, strictly speaking, no Fall in the Qur’an. What the Qur’anic narration focuses upon is the moral choice that humanity is required to make when confronted by the alternatives presented by God and the Shaitan. This becomes clear if one reflects on the text of Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:35 and Surah 7: *Al-A’raf*:19, in which it is stated: “You (dual) go not near this Tree, lest you (dual) become of the ‘zalimin.’” In other words, the human pair is being told that *if* they will go near the Tree, *then* they will be counted among those who perpetrate *zulm*. Commenting on the root *zlm*, Toshihiko Izutsu says,

The primary meaning of *ZLM* is, in the opinion of many authoritative lexicologists, that of “putting in a wrong place.” In the moral sphere it seems to mean primarily “to act in such a way as to transgress the proper limit and encroach upon the right of some other person.” Briefly and generally speaking “*zulm*” is to do injustice in the sense of going beyond one’s bounds and doing what one has no right to (Izutsu, 152-53).

By transgressing the limits set by God, the human pair become guilty of *zulm* toward themselves. This *zulm* consists in their taking on the respon-

sibility for choosing between good and evil. Here it is important to note that the

Qur'anic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience. The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being. Nor does the Qur'an regard the earth as a torture-hall where an elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned for an original act of sin. Man's first act of disobedience was also his first act of free choice; and that is why, according to the Qur'anic narration, Adam's first transgression was forgiven. . . . A being whose movements are wholly determined like a machine cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus a condition of goodness. But to permit the emergence of a finite ego who has the power to choose, after considering the relative values of several courses of action open to him, is really to take a great risk; for the freedom to choose good involves also the freedom to choose what is the opposite of good. That God has taken this risk shows His immense faith in man; it is now for man to justify this faith (Iqbal, 85).

There is no Fall in the Qur'an, hence there is no original sin. Human beings are not born sinful into this world, hence do not need to be redeemed or saved. This is generally accepted in the Islamic tradition. However, the association of the Fall with sexuality, which has played such a massive role in perpetuating the myth of feminine evil in the Christian tradition, also exists in the minds of many Muslims and causes untold damage to Muslim women.

It is remarkable to see that though there is no reference to sexual activity on the part of man or woman even in their postlapsarian state of partial or complete nakedness in either Genesis 3 or the Qur'an, many Muslims and scholars have jumped to the conclusion that exposure of their *sau'at* ("the external portion of the organs of generation of a man, and of a woman, and the anus," Lane, 1458), generally translated as "shameful parts," necessarily led the human pair to sexual activity that was "shameful" not only by virtue of being linked with their "shameful parts," but also because it was instigated by the Shaitan. The following explanation by A. A. Maududi—one of contemporary Islam's most influential scholars—represents the thinking of many, if not most, Muslims on this point:

The sex instinct is the greatest weakness of the human race. That is why Satan selected this weak spot for his attack on the adversary and

devised the scheme to strike at their modesty. Therefore the first step he took in this direction was to expose their nakedness to them so as to open the door of indecency before them and beguile them into sexuality. Even to this day, Satan and his disciples are adopting the same scheme of depriving the woman of the feelings of modesty and shyness, and they cannot think of any scheme of “progress” unless they expose and exhibit the woman to all and sundry (Maududi 1976, 16, n. 13).

The initial statement leaves no doubt about Maududi’s negative view of the sex instinct, which he describes as “the greatest weakness of the human race.” Associating sexuality with the Shaitan’s “attack on the adversary,” Maududi assumes that on discovering their state of physical exposure, the human pair resorted irresistibly to an act of “indecency,” that is, sexual intercourse. In fact, according to the text, the human pair’s first act on discovering their exposed state was one of “decency,” namely, that of covering themselves with leaves.

That Maududi—like many other Muslims, Jews, and Christians—sees women as the primary agents of sexuality, which is regarded as the Shaitan’s chief instrument for defeating God’s plan for humanity, is clear from the way in which he shifts attention from the human pair to the woman in the above passage. In turning his eyes away from the “nakedness” of the sons of Adam to focus on the nakedness of the daughters of Hawwa’, he is typical of Muslim culture.

Though the branding of women as “the devil’s gateway”¹⁰ is not at all the intent of the Qur’anic narration of the Fall story—as the foregoing account has shown—Muslims, no less than Jews and Christians, have used the story to vent their misogynistic feelings. This is clear from the continuing popularity of *ahadith* such as the following:

The Prophet said, “After me I have not left any affliction more harmful to men than women” (Kahn, 22).

Ibn Abbas reported that Allah’s Messenger said: “I had a chance to look into Paradise and I found that the majority of the people were poor and I looked into the Fire and there I found the majority constituted by women.”

Abu Sa’id Khudri reported that Allah’s Messenger said: “The world is sweet and green (alluring) and verily Allah is going to install you as viceregent in it in order to see how you act. So avoid the allurements of women: verily, the first trial for the people of Isra’il was caused by women” (Siddiqui, 1431).

Why Was Woman Created?

The Qur’an, which does not discriminate against women in the context of creation or the Fall episode, does not support the view—held by many

Muslims, Christians, and Jews—that woman was created not only *from* man but also *for* man. That God’s creation as a whole is “for just ends” (Surah 15: *Al-Hijr*:85) and not “for idle sport” (Surah 21: *Al-Anbiya*:16) is one of the major themes of the Qur’an. Humanity, fashioned “in the best of moulds” (Surah 95: *At-Tin*:4) has been created in order to serve God (Surah 51: *Adh-Dhariyat*:56). According to Qur’anic teaching, service to God cannot be separated from service to humankind, or—in Islamic terms—believers in God must honor both “*Haquq Allah*” (rights of God) and “*Haquq al’ibad*” (rights of creatures). Fulfillment of one’s duties to God and humankind constitutes the essence of righteousness.¹¹ That men and women are equally called upon by God to be righteous and will be equally rewarded for their righteousness is stated unambiguously in a number of Qur’anic passages such as the following:

And their Lord . . . answered them
 “Never will I suffer to be lost
 The work of any of you,
 Be he male or female:
 Ye are members, one of another.”
 (Surah 3: *Al-Imran*:195;
The Holy Qur’an, 174-75)

If any do deeds
 of righteousness,—
 be they male or female—
 And have faith,
 They will enter Heaven,
 And not the least injustice
 Will be done to them.
 (Surah 4: *An-Nisa*:124;
The Holy Qur’an, 219)

The Believers, men
 And women, are protectors,
 One of another: they enjoin
 What is just, and forbid
 What is evil: they observe
 Regular prayers, practice
 Regular charity, and obey
 God and His Apostle.
 On them will God pour
 His mercy: for God
 Is Exalted in power, Wise.
 God hath promised to Believers,
 Men and women, Gardens

Under which rivers flow,
 To swell therein,
 And beautiful mansions
 In Gardens of everlasting bliss.
 But the greatest bliss
 Is the Good Pleasure of God:
 That is the supreme felicity.
 (Surah 9: *At-Taubah*:71-72;
The Holy Qur'an, 461)

Whoever works righteousness,
 Man or woman, and has Faith,
 Verily, to him will We give
 A new Life, a life
 That is good and pure, and We
 Will bestow on such their reward
 According to the best
 Of their actions.
 (Surah 16: *An-Nahl*:97;
The Holy Qur'an, 683)

For Muslim men and women, —
 For believing men and women,
 For devout men and women,
 For true men and women,
 For men and women who are
 Patient and constant, for men
 And women who humble themselves,
 For men and women who give
 In Charity, for men and women
 Who fast (and deny themselves),
 For men and women who
 Engage much in God's praise, —
 For them has God prepared
 Forgiveness and great reward.
 (Surah 23: *Al-Ahzab*:35;
The Holy Qur'an, 1116-17)

Not only does the Qur'an make it clear that man and woman stand absolutely equal in the sight of God, but also that they are "members" and "protectors" of each other. In other words, the Qur'an does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women (as they are by many formulators of the Christian tradition), nor does it pit men against women in an adversary relationship. They are created as equal creatures of a uni-

versal, just, and merciful God whose pleasure it is that they live—in harmony and in righteousness—together.

In spite of the Qur'anic affirmation of man-woman equality, Muslim societies in general have never regarded men and women as equal, particularly in the context of marriage. Fatima Mernissi's observations on the position of a Muslim woman in relation to her family in modern Morocco apply, more or less, to Muslim culture generally:

One of the distinctive characteristics of Muslim sexuality is its territoriality, which reflects a specific division of labor and a specific conception of society and of power. The territoriality of Muslim sexuality sets ranks, tasks, and authority patterns. Spatially confined the woman was taken care of materially by the man who possessed her, in return for her total obedience and her sexual and reproductive services. The whole system was organized so that the Muslim "ummah" was actually a society of male citizens who possessed among other things the female half of the population. . . . Muslim men have always had more rights and privileges than Muslim women, including even the right to kill their women. . . . The man imposed on the woman an artificially narrow existence, both physically and spiritually (Mernissi, 103).

Underlying the rejection in Muslim societies of the idea of man-woman equality is the deeply-rooted belief that women—who are inferior in creation (having been made from a crooked rib) and in righteousness (having helped the Shaitan in defeating God's plan for Adam)—have been created mainly to be of use to men who are superior to them.

The alleged superiority of men to women that permeates the Islamic (as also the Jewish and Christian) tradition is grounded not only in Hadith literature but also in popular interpretations of some Qur'anic passages. Two Qur'anic passages—Surah 4: *An-Nisa'*:34 and Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:288—in particular, are generally cited to support the contention that men have a "degree of advantage" over women. Of these, the first reads as follows in A. A. Maududi's translation of the Arabic text:

Men are the managers of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other and because men spend of their wealth on women. Virtuous women are, therefore, obedient; they guard their rights carefully in their absence under the care and watch of Allah. As for those women whose defiance you have cause to fear, admonish them and keep them apart from your beds and beat them. Then, if they submit to you, do not look for excuses to punish them: note it well that there is Allah above you, who is Supreme and Great (Maududi 1971, 321).

It is difficult to overstate the impact of the general Muslim understanding of Surah 4: *An-Nisa'*:34 that is embodied in Maududi's translation. As soon

as the issue of woman's equality with man is raised by liberals, the immediate response by traditionalists is, "But don't you know that God says in the Qur'an that men are *'qawwamun'* in relation to women and have the right to rule over them and even to beat them?" In fact, the mere statement "*ar-rijal-o qawwamun-a 'ala an-nisa'*" (literally, the men are *qawwamun* — "managers" in Maududi's translation — in relation to the women) signifies the end of any attempt to discuss the issue of woman's equality with man in the Islamic *ummah*.

It is assumed by almost all who read Surah 4, verse 34, that it is addressed to husbands. The first point to be noted is that it is addressed to "*ar-rijal*" (the men) and to "*an-nisa'*" (the women). In other words, it is addressed to all men and women of the Islamic community. This is further indicated by the fact that in relation to all the actions that are required to be taken, the plural and not the dual form (used when reference is made to two persons) is found. Such usage makes clear that the orders contained in this verse were not addressed to a husband or wife but to the Islamic *ummah* in general.

The key word in the first sentence of this verse is *qawwamun*. This word has been translated variously as "protectors and maintainers [of women]," "in charge [of women]," "having preeminence [above women]," and "sovereigns or masters [over women]." Linguistically, the word *qawwamun* means "breadwinners" or "those who provide a means of support or livelihood." A point of logic that must be made here is that the first sentence is not a descriptive one stating that all men as a matter of fact are providing for women, since obviously there are at least some men who do not provide for women. What the sentence is stating, rather, is that men ought to have the capability to provide (since ought implies can). In other words, this statement, which almost all Muslim societies have taken to be an actual description of all men, is in fact a normative statement pertaining to the Islamic concept of division of labor in an ideal family or community structure. The fact that men are *qawwamun* does not mean that women cannot or should not provide for themselves, but simply that in view of the heavy burden that most women shoulder with regard to childbearing and rearing, they should not have the additional obligation of providing the means of living at the same time.

Continuing with the analysis of the passage, we come next to the idea that God has given the one more strength than the other. Most translations make it appear that the one who has more strength, excellence, or superiority is the man. However, the Qur'anic expression does not accord superiority to men. The expression literally means "some in relation to some," so that the statement could mean either that some men are superior to some others (men and/or women) and that some women are superior to some others (men and/or women). The interpretation that seems to me to be the most appropriate contextually is that some men are more blessed with the means to be better providers than are other men.

The next part of the passage begins with "therefore," which indicates that this part is conditional upon the first; in other words, if men fulfill their assigned function of being providers, women must fulfill their corresponding duties. Most translations describe this duty in terms of the wife being "obedient" to the husband. The word *salihat*, which is translated as "righteously obedient," is related to the word *salahiat*, which means "capability" or "potentiality," not obedience. Women's special capability is to bear children. The word *qanitat*, which succeeds the word *salihat* and is also translated as "obedient," is related to a water bag in which water is carried from one place to another without spilling. The woman's special function, then—according to this passage—is that, like the bag in which water is transported without loss to its destination, she carries and protects the fetus in her womb until it can be safely delivered.

What is outlined in the first part of this passage is a functional division of labor necessary for maintaining balance in any society. Men who do not have to fulfill the responsibility of childbearing are assigned the function of being breadwinners. Women are exempted from the responsibility of being breadwinners in order that they may fulfill their function as childbearers. The two functions are separate but complementary and neither is higher or lower than the other.

The three injunctions in the second part of the verse were given to the Islamic *ummah* in order to meet a rather extraordinary possibility: a mass rebellion on the part of women against their role as childbearers, the function assigned to them by God. If all or most of the women in a Muslim society refused to bear children without just cause as a sign of organized defiance or revolt, this would mean the end of the Muslim *ummah*. This situation must, therefore, be dealt with decisively. The first step taken is to counsel the rebels. If this step is unsuccessful, the second step to be taken is isolation of the rebellious women from significant others. (It is to be noted here that the prescription is "to leave the women alone in their beds." By translating this line as "keep them apart from your beds," Maududi is suggesting, if not stating, that the judging party is the husband and not the Islamic community—an assumption not warranted by the text.) If the second step is also not successful, then the step of confining the women for a longer period of time may be taken by the Islamic *ummah* or its representatives. Here, it is important to point out that the Arabic word generally translated "being" has numerous meanings. When used in a legal context, as it is here, it means "holding in confinement" according to the authoritative lexicon *Taj al-'Arus* (Shehab, 117). (In Surah 4: *An-Nisa*:15, unchaste women are also prescribed the punishment of being confined to their homes.)

While Muslims through the centuries have interpreted Surah *An-Nisa*:34 as giving them unequivocal mastery over women, a linguistically and philosophically/theologically accurate interpretation of this passage would lead to radically different conclusions. In simple words what this passage is

saying is that since only women can bear children (which is not to say either that all women should bear children or that women's sole function is to bear children)—a function whose importance in the survival of any community cannot be questioned—they should not have the additional obligation of being breadwinners while they perform this function. Thus during the period of a woman's childbearing, the function of breadwinning must be performed by men (not just husbands) in the Muslim *ummah*. Reflection on this Qur'anic passage shows that the division of functions mandated here is designed to ensure justice in the community as a whole. While there are millions of women all over the world—and I am one of them—who are designated inaccurately as single parents (when, in fact, they are *double* parents), who bear and raise children single-handedly, generally without much support from the community, this surely does not constitute a just situation. If children are the wealth and future of the *ummah*, the importance of protecting the function of childbearing and childraising becomes self-evident. Statistics from all over the world show that women and children left without the care and custodianship of men suffer from economic, social, psychological, and other ills.

What Surah *An-Nisa*:34 is ensuring is that this does not happen. It enjoins men in general to assume responsibility for women in general when they are performing the vitally important function of childbearing (other passages in the Qur'an extend this also to childrearing). Thus, the intent of this passage that has traditionally been used to subordinate women to men in fact is to guarantee women the material (as well as moral) security needed by them during the period of pregnancy when breadwinning can become difficult or even impossible for them.

The second passage that mentions the "degree of advantage" men have over women is Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:228, which reads

Divorced women
 Shall wait concerning [remarriage after divorce]
 For three monthly periods.
 Nor is it lawful for them
 To hide what God
 Hath created in their wombs,
 If they have faith
 In God and the Last Day.
 And their husbands
 Have the better right
 To take them back
 In that period, if
 They wish for reconciliation.
 And women shall have rights
 Similar to the rights
 Against them, according

*To what is equitable;
 But men have a degree
 (Of advantage) over them,
 And God is exalted in Power, Wise.
 (The Holy Qur'an, 89-90. Emphasis mine)*

As can be seen, the above-cited passage pertains to the subject of divorce. The "advantage" that men have over women in this context is that women must observe a three-month period called *iddat* before remarriage, but men are exempted from this requirement. The main reason why women are subjected to this restriction is because at the time of divorce a woman may be pregnant and this fact may not become known for some time. As men cannot become pregnant, they are allowed to remarry without a waiting period.

In my judgment, the Qur'anic passages—in particular the two discussed above on which the edifice of male superiority over women largely rests—have been misread or misinterpreted, intentionally or unintentionally, by most Muslim societies and men. A correct reading of these passages would not, however, make a radical or substantial difference to the existing pattern of male-female relationships in Muslim societies unless attention was also drawn to those *ahadith* that have been used to make man not only superior to a woman but virtually into her god. The following Hadith is particularly important:

A man came . . . with his daughter and said, "This my daughter refuses to get married." The Prophet said, "Obey your father." She said, "By the name of Him Who sent you in truth, I will not marry until you inform me what is the right of the husband over his wife." He said, . . . "If it were permitted for one human being to bow down (*sajada*) to another I would have ordered the woman to bow down to her husband when he enters into her, because of God's grace on her." (The daughter) answered, "By the name of Him Who sent you, with truth, I would never marry!" (Sadiq Hasan Khan, 281).

A faith as rigidly monotheistic as Islam cannot conceivably permit any human being to worship anyone but God, therefore the hypothetical statement "If it were permitted" in the above cited Hadith is, *ipso facto*, an impossibility. But the way this Hadith is related makes it appear that if not God's, at least it was the Prophet's will or wish to make the wife prostrate herself before her husband. Each word, act, or exhortation attributed to the Prophet is held to be sacred by most of the Muslims in the world and so this Hadith (which in my judgment seeks to legitimate *shirk*, associating anyone with God—an unforgivable sin according to the Qur'an) becomes binding on the Muslim woman. Muslims frequently criticize a religion such as Hinduism in which the wife is required to worship the husband (*patipuja*)

but in practice what is expected from most Muslim wives is not very different from *patipuja*. In India and Pakistan, for example, a Muslim woman learns almost as an article of faith that her husband is her *majazi Khuda* (god in earthly form). This description, undoubtedly, constitutes a *shirk*.

Man and woman, created equal by God and standing equal in the sight of God, have become very unequal in Muslim societies. The Qur'anic description of man and woman in marriage: "They are your garments/And you are their garments" (Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:187) implies closeness, mutuality, and equality. However, Muslim culture has reduced many, if not most, women to the position of puppets on a string, to slave-like creatures whose only purpose in life is to cater to the needs and pleasures of men. Not only this, it has also had the audacity and the arrogance to deny women direct access to God. Islam rejects the idea of redemption, of any intermediary between a believer and the Creator. It is one of Islam's cardinal beliefs that each person—man and woman—is responsible and accountable for his or her individual actions. How, then, can the husband become the wife's gateway to heaven or hell? How, then, can he become the arbiter not only of what happens to her in this world but also of her ultimate destiny? Surely such questions must arise in the minds of thoughtful Muslim women, but so far they have not been asked aloud and my own feeling is that not only Muslim men but also Muslim women are afraid to ask questions the answers to which are bound to threaten the existing balance of power in the domain of family relationships in most Muslim societies.

MUSLIM WOMEN AND POST-PATRIARCHAL ISLAM: IN SUMMATION

The foregoing account provides much evidence for arguing that the patriarchal assumptions and attitudes that are deeply entrenched and universally present in Muslim culture have had serious negative implications—both theoretical and practical—for Muslim women throughout Muslim history up until the present time. At the same time, it has been amply demonstrated that the Qur'an, which to Muslims in general is the most authoritative source of Islam, does not discriminate against women despite the sad and bitter fact of history that the cumulative (Jewish, Christian, Hellenistic, Bedouin, and other) biases that existed in the Arab-Islamic culture of the early centuries of Islam infiltrated the Islamic tradition, largely through the Hadith literature, and undermined the intent of the Qur'an to liberate women from the status of chattel or inferior creatures and make them free and equal to men. Not only does the Qur'an emphasize that righteousness is identical in the case of man or woman, but it affirms, clearly and consistently, women's equality with men and their fundamental right to actualize the human potential that they share equally with men. In fact, when seen through a non-patriarchal lens, the Qur'an goes beyond egalitarianism. It exhibits particular solicitude toward women as also toward other classes of

disadvantaged persons. It also provides particular safeguards for protecting women's special sexual/biological functions such as carrying, delivering, suckling, and rearing offspring.

In view of what women in the major religious traditions of the world have suffered in the name or interest of patriarchal values or systems and structures of thought and conduct, it is hardly surprising that many feminist theologians consider the rejection of patriarchy a prerequisite for the liberation of women from various forms of injustice. However, when patriarchy is seen as indissolubly linked with the "core" of a religious tradition—for instance, with God in the context of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—then the rejection of the one generally involves the rejection of the other. This is why a number of feminist theologians have in the post-patriarchal phase of their thinking gone beyond their religious traditions altogether. Rejecting God, who is identified by them with maleness, they have also, oftentimes, rejected men-women relationships and childbearing, seeing both heterosexual marriage and childbearing as patriarchal institutions used to enslave and exploit women.

However, to me, patriarchy is not integral to the Islam embodied in the Qur'an nor is God thought of as male by Muslims in general. Rejection of patriarchy does not, therefore, have to lead to rejection of God in whom a Muslim's faith is grounded. Here it needs to be pointed out that being a Muslim is dependent essentially only upon one belief: belief in God, universal creator and sustainer who sends revelation for the guidance of humanity. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has remarked insightfully, "A true Muslim . . . is not a man who believes in Islam—especially Islam in history; but one who believes in God and is committed to the revelation through His Prophet" (Smith, 146).

God, who speaks through the Qur'an, is characterized by justice, and it is stated with the utmost clarity in the Qur'an that God can never be guilty of *zulm* (unfairness, tyranny, oppression, or wrongdoing). Hence, the Qur'an, as God's Word, cannot be made the source of human injustice, and the injustice to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be regarded as God-derived. Historically, as this essay has shown, some of the passages in the Qur'an have been interpreted in such a way that they appear to support what seems—from a twentieth-century Muslim feminist perspective—to be unjust ways of thinking and behaving. However, given the incredible richness of the Arabic language, in which virtually every word has multiple meanings and nuances, it is possible—and necessary—to reinterpret these passages differently so that their import or implication is not contrary to the justice of God.

To me, in the final analysis, post-patriarchal Islam is nothing other than Qur'anic Islam, which is profoundly concerned with freeing human beings—women as well as men—from the bondage of traditionalism, authoritarianism (religious, political, economic, or any other), tribalism, racism, sexism, slavery, or anything else that prohibits or inhibits human beings from

actualizing the Qur'anic vision of human destiny embodied in the classical proclamation, "Towards God is thy limit" (Surah 53: *An-Najm*:42; trans. by Iqbal, 57).

The goal of Qur'anic Islam is to establish peace, which is the very meaning of *islam*. However, from the perspective of the Qur'an, peace is not to be understood to be a passive state of affairs, a mere absence of war. It is a positive state of safety or security in which one is free from anxiety or fear. It is this state that characterizes both *islam*, self-surrender to God, and *iman*, true faith in God, and reference is made to it, directly or indirectly, on every page of the Qur'an through the many derivatives of the roots "s-l-m" and "a-m-n" from which *islam* and *iman* are derived respectively. According to Qur'anic teaching, peace can only exist within a just environment. In other words, justice is a prerequisite for peace. Without the elimination of the inequities, inequalities, and injustices that pervade the personal and collective lives of human beings, it is not possible to talk about peace in Qur'anic terms. Here it is of vital importance to note that there is more Qur'anic legislation pertaining to the establishment of justice in the context of family relationships than on any other subject. This points to the assumption implicit in much Qur'anic legislation, namely, that if human beings can learn to order their homes justly so that the rights of all within its jurisdiction—children, women, and men—are safeguarded, then they can also order their society and the world at large justly. In other words, the Qur'an regards the home as a microcosm of the *ummah* and the world community, and emphasizes the importance of making it "the abode of peace" through just living.

Despite everything that has gone wrong with the lives of countless Muslim women down the ages due to patriarchal Islam, I believe strongly that there is hope for the future. As an increasing number of Muslims—men and women—begin to reflect more and more deeply upon the teachings of the Qur'an, they begin to see more and more clearly that the supreme task entrusted to human beings by God, of being God's deputies on earth, can only be accomplished by going beyond patriarchal views and values. The message contained in Surah 4: *An-Nisa*':34, which ensures justice between men and women in the context of childbearing, can be extended and universalized to embrace all aspects of human interaction and relatedness. As this happens, the shackles of patriarchal traditions will fall away and the Qur'anic vision of what it means to be a Muslim will begin to be actualized in a world from which the myth of woman's inferiority and "crookedness" has finally been expelled.

NOTES

Bibliographic information on works cited is to be found in the bibliography following the notes.

1. For a more detailed discussion of the issue of woman's creation, see Hassan 1985 and 1987.

2. For instance, Surah 4: *An-Nisa*:1; Surah 7: *Al-A'raf*:189; and Surah 39: *Az-Zumar*:6.

3. In the aforementioned passages (as also in Surah 6: *Al-An'am*:98 and Surah 31: *Luqman*:28) reference is made to the creation from one source or being (*nafs in wahidatin*) of all human beings. Muslims, with hardly any exceptions, believe that the one original source or being referred to in these passages is a man named Adam. This belief has led many translators of the Qur'an to incorrect translation of simple Qur'anic passages. For instance, Surah 4: *An-Nisa*:1, if correctly translated, reads as follows: "O 'an-nas' be circumspect in keeping your duty to your Sustainer who created you (plural) from one being ('nafs in wahidatin') and spread from her ('minha') her mate ('zaujaha') and spread from these two beings many men and women." However, most translators translate the feminine attached pronoun "ha" in *minha* and *zaujaha* as "his" instead of as "her." How is such a mistake possible? Could it be the case that given their preconceptions and psychological orientation, these interpreters of the Qur'an, who all happen to be men, are totally unable to imagine that the first creation could have been other than male? Or are they afraid that a correct translation of "ha" might suggest the idea—even for an instant—that woman, not man, was the prior creation and therefore superior if priority connotes superiority, and that man was created from woman and not the other way around (which, in a reversal of the Eve-being-created-from-the-rib-of-Adam story, would give Eve the primacy traditionally accorded to Adam)? Certainly no Qur'anic exegete to date has suggested the possibility that *nafs in wahidatin* might refer to woman rather than man.

4. In this context, Leonard Swidler remarks:

It is a mistake to translate it (*ha adam*) in Genesis 1:22 either as man in the male sense or as a proper name, Adam . . . until Genesis 4:25 the definite article "ha" is almost always used with *adam*, precluding the possibility of its being a proper name; in 4:25 it becomes a proper name, "Adam" without the "ha." Moreover, it is clearly a collective noun in Genesis 1:22, as can be seen in the plural "let *them* be masters" (Genesis 1:22) (Swidler, 76).

5. *Adam* is used as a proper name in Surah 3: *Al-Imran*:35 and 59; Surah 5: *Al-Ma'idah*:30; and Surah 19: *Maryam*:58.

6. For instance, in Surah 75: *Al-Qiyamah*:36-39. This passage reads: "Does *al-insan* think that he will be left aimless? Was he not a drop of semen emitted? Then he became something which clings. Then He (Allah) created and shaped and made of him two mates: the male and the female."

7. Each Hadith consists of two parts: *isnad* (or *sanad*) and *matn*. The *isnad* contains the names of persons who have handed on the substance of the Hadith to one another. The *matn* is the text or actual substance of the Hadith.

8. Since the early centuries of Islam it has been axiomatic for (Sunni) Muslim masses to regard the Companions of the Prophet as being totally above the suspicion of being untrustworthy in any way, least of all as transmitters of the Prophet's *ahadith*. Given such an attitude of absolute devotion, a critical examination of the credentials of the Companions as transmitters could hardly have been undertaken.

As Ignaz Goldziher has observed: "To be a Companion of the Prophet was the highest dignity obtainable. The person and honor of such people were considered untouchable, and to slight them would have been considered a capital crime" (Goldziher, 163). However, in the earliest phase of the development of Islam, a more critical attitude prevailed toward the Hadith literature and its transmitters. Here it is of interest to note that according to the well-known Muslim scholar 'Abdul Wahab Ash-Shairani, Imam Abu Hanifah, considered to be the founder of the largest school of law in Sunni Islam, did not consider Abu Hurairah to be a reliable transmitter of *ahadith* (Ash-Shairani, 59).

9. It is interesting to observe that while in the Genesis 2 story, woman is derived from Adam's rib, there is no mention of Adam in any of the *ahadith* under discussion. This is a further "dehumanization" of woman since she could—in the *ahadith* in question—have been created from a disembodied rib which may not even have been human.

10. The famous expression comes from Tertullian, a church father from North Africa who wrote:

And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die (*De cultu feminarum* 1:1, cited in Swidler, 346).

11. The Qur'anic understanding of "righteousness" is described in Surah 2: *Al-Baqarah*:177, which states:

It is not righteousness
That ye turn your faces
Towards East or West;
But it is righteousness—
To believe in God
And the Last Day,
And the Angels,
And the Book,
And the Messengers;
To spend of your substance,
Out of love of Him,
For your kin,
For orphans,
For the wayfarer,
For those who ask,
And for the ransom of slaves;
To be steadfast in prayer,
And practice regular charity;
To fulfill the contracts
Which ye have made;

And to be firm and patient,
 In pain (or suffering)
 And adversity,
 And throughout
 All periods of panic.
 Such are the people
 Of truth, the God-fearing
 (*The Holy Qur'an*, 69-70).

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